

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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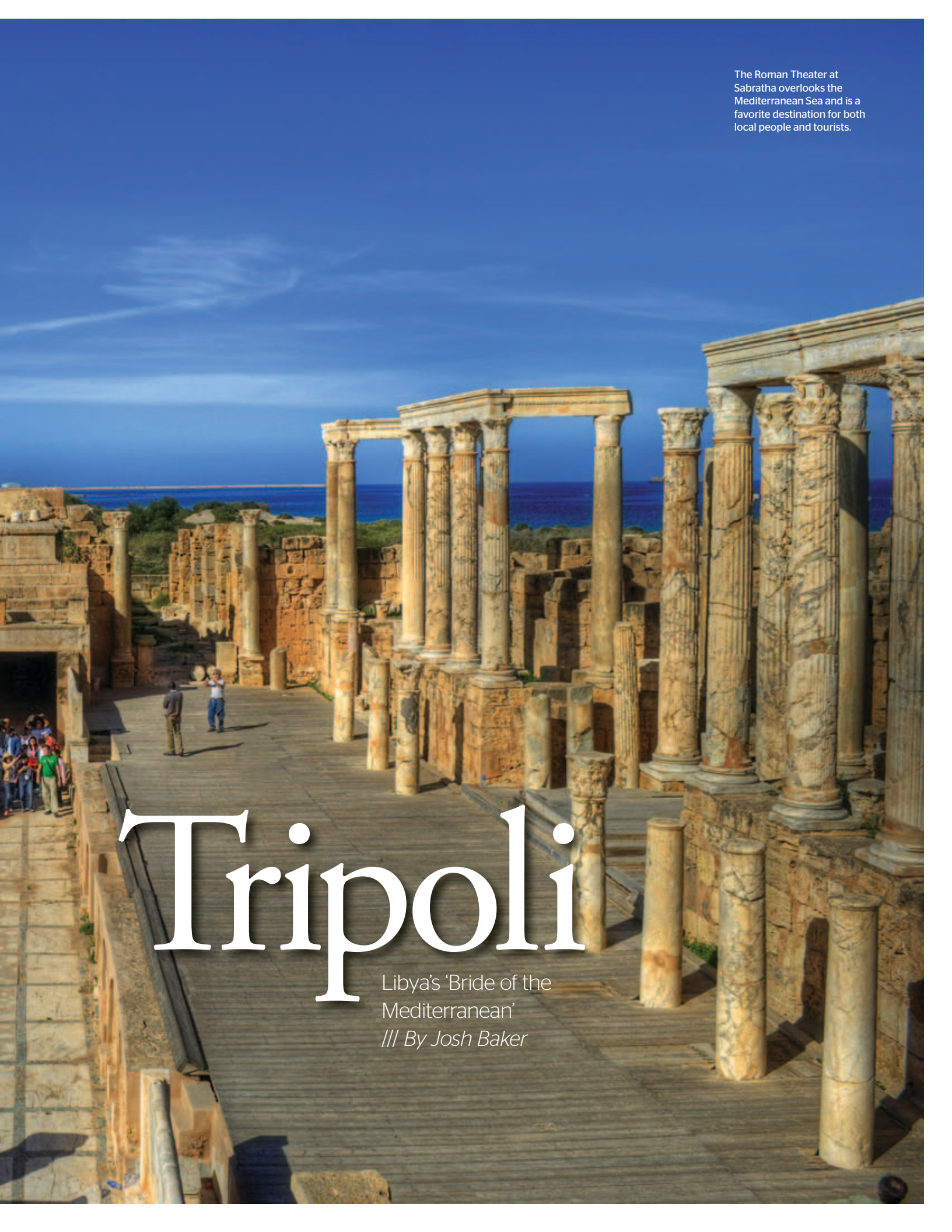


***Libya's Bold Past,
Promising Future***



Post of the Month





The Roman Theater at Sabratha overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and is a favorite destination for both local people and tourists.

Tripoli

Libya's 'Bride of the
Mediterranean'

/// By Josh Baker

The Islamic Call Mosque in Algeria Square, formerly an Italian cathedral, is emblematic of today's Tripoli, combining the country's rich history with contemporary values.



Above: Ambassador and Mrs. Gene Cretz enjoy the spectacular desertscapes of the Great Sahara in southern Libya. **Above right:** Pedestrians walk down a narrow street in a traditional Tripoli neighborhood.

Known throughout the centuries as the “Bride of the Mediterranean,” Tripoli has long been a crossroads of civilizations and a prize sought by Mediterranean powers. The Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs and Ottomans all counted Tripoli, with her lapis waters and white sand beaches, among their most significant possessions. Each civilization left its indelible mark on the city and the psyche of its people.

The towering Marcus Aurelius Arch, the Ottoman Saraya fortress and the intricate mosques of the old quarter are testaments to the importance of the city to the Mediterranean and Islamic world. Located on the Mediterranean coast, Tripoli was one of a string of Phoenician trading posts that developed into some of the most advanced cities of their day. Following the Punic Wars, Rome gained possession of all of the Phoenician North African possessions and renamed the city Oea and the region Tripolitania. With its grapes, olives, grains and wild animals, it became the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. It was also the principal source of and a major thoroughfare for slaves to all corners of the empire.

Libya is an archaeologist's dream come true. The Roman ruins at Sabratha and Leptis Magna are without parallel anywhere in the world. The U.S. Embassy in Tripoli is working closely with the Libyan government to preserve the country's rich history. A 2010 Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation grant will improve the comprehensive management of collections of art works and artifacts at the archaeological museum at



Cyrene, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The effort will entail thorough inventory, documentation and assessment of conservation needs and training of staff at the regional Department of Antiquities in modern museum collection management practices.

The Shores of Tripoli

The Marines' Hymn, the oldest official U.S. military song, lionized the exploits of the first Marine action overseas. The second section of the line “From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli” refers to the First Barbary War and specifically the Battle of Derna in 1805, when American forces under the leadership of the former U.S. consul in Tripoli raised the U.S. flag in victory for the first time on foreign soil.

(LEFT) DAVID BRADFIELD; (RIGHT) ALLISON LEE; (OPPOSITE PAGE TOP) JASMIN MOY; (BOTTOM) DAVID BRADFIELD



Top: A traditional Libyan dinner of grilled vegetables and chicken becks. **Above:** The American flag was raised over the embassy for the first time on May 13. **Below left:** The Saraya Al-Hamra Castle in Green Square is an imposing landmark in Tripoli's old city. **Right:** Assistant General Services Officer Faybein Moy, left, and embassy phone operator Eman Tajouri celebrate "Embassy Unification Day" in December 2009, when all mission sections and agencies were moved into one compound.

Today, the Defense Attaché's Office is cultivating a growing relationship with the Libyan military. Cooperative programs have included military leadership visits and exchanges, working-level discussions with U.S. Africa Command staff, familiarization trips to U.S. military facilities, International Military Education and Training programs, a U.S. Coast Guard ship visit and technical advising for Libya's C-130 transport aircraft fleet.

Additionally, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli is working with the Libyan government to renovate the U.S.-Libyan Cemetery on a bluff overlooking Tripoli harbor. It is the final resting place of servicemen who died here in the First Barbary War. The Libyan Department of Antiquities is sourcing materials that match those used in the original construction, including hinges from Turkey for the cemetery's gates, local limestone to rebuild the cemetery's outer walls and tiles to recover gravestones that have suffered from years of neglect and exposure to the strong North African sun. The Libyan government recently placed the cemetery under its protection by designating it a site of significant cultural heritage.

The New Libya

When the Kingdom of Libya gained its independence in 1951 under King Idris Sanusi, it was considered to be among the poorest countries in the world. That all changed with the discovery of oil in 1959. Libya, and in particular Tripoli, saw an economic explosion with average annual incomes increasing from \$25 to \$2,000 in less than 10 years.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, Libya existed almost in a time warp. The devastating effects of sanctions and global isolation stopped nearly all infrastructure development. In striking contrast, Libya today is booming, with constant roadwork and myriad new construction projects led by Korean, Chinese, Turkish and Brazilian companies. Investment in infrastructure alone has topped nearly \$80 billion.

American companies have returned in large numbers, focusing on infrastructure development, consulting and program management, and the oil and gas services industry. In February, the embassy hosted the first U.S. government-led trade mission to Libya in nearly 40 years, with participation by 25 U.S. companies specializing in energy, infrastructure, health care, telecommunications, transportation and other key economic sectors. In May, the United States and Libya signed a bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which will pave the way for closer engagement on commercial issues.





A U.S. education has once again become a highly prized objective. The Libyan government is sending 1,500 graduate and doctoral candidate students to the United States on scholarships, and the embassy is facilitating scholarships and training programs for more than 200 Libyan students and professionals. English is widely understood in the major cities despite a significant period in the recent past in which all English-language education was stripped from the national school curriculum and possession of English-language magazines or books was a punishable offense.

Top: From left, Political-Economic Chief Natalie Baker, Pol-Econ Section Office Management Specialist Erin Cederlind, Assistant Regional Security Officer Jonathan Poole and Cultural Affairs Officer Jared Caplan enjoy an afternoon at the Great Saharan Oasis of Ghaberoun. **Above:** Anna Linniv, a teacher at the American School of Tripoli, tours the Benghazi old city. **Right:** Libyan boy scouts rest during a tour of the Roman city Leptis Magna.

The U.S. Embassy

The recent warming of bilateral relations comes against the backdrop of a long and complicated relationship. After the withdrawal of the last U.S. ambassador in 1972 and all remaining U.S. government personnel in 1979, the United States and Libya experienced a nearly 40-year break in relations. A direct diplomatic presence officially resumed in 2004 with the arrival of U.S. personnel at the U.S. Interest Section in Tripoli, which was then upgraded to a Liaison Office. The first U.S. Embassy was opened inside the Corinthia Bab Afriqiyah Hotel, occupying several floors, in mid-2006. On Dec. 27, 2008, Ambassador Gene A. Cretz became the first U.S. ambassador in 36 years to assume duties in Tripoli.

The embassy is now located in a residential neighborhood. An Overseas Buildings Operations project is transforming a series of villas into a temporary embassy compound until a new compound site is identified and approved.

Operations are quickly normalizing: The embassy's first landline telephones were installed this year, and the consular section now offers full nonimmigrant visa processing and American citizen services in a state-of-the-art facility. Almost 7,000 visas have been

issued since nonimmigrant visa operations began in April 2009.

Political-economic section Office Management Specialist Erin Cederlind recalled the emotions she felt while seeing the U.S. flag rise over the embassy on





Weathered pillars stand like silent sentinels in the Roman city of Sabratha.

May 13, 2009, for the first time in several decades, in an article for the embassy's newsletter, "The Tripoli Tales:"

With hands on our hearts, listening to a recording of our national anthem, the flag was slowly raised and began to flutter in a gentle breeze. Everyone was absolutely silent; you could feel a collective sense of awe go through the crowd. As it reached the top and the anthem ended, the cheering and applause began. Before long, the logistics of the event continued, the press did interviews, photos were taken, people went back to their desks, but for the rest of the day there seemed to be a glow on everyone's faces.

Souks and Beaches

It is not easy setting up a new mission, but Embassy Tripoli employees still find time for fun. In addition to bargaining for antiques in the souks of the old quarter, staffers usually head to the gorgeous beaches near Tripoli on weekends. Archaeological tourism is popular; Libya is home to some of the most impressive Phoenician, Greek and Roman ruins in the world. Desert tourism to Tuareg outposts in the South such as Ghat and Ubari offers Saharan lakes, pre-historic rock art and a glimpse of caravan routes that have changed little in hundreds of years.

Recreation options include tennis courts, a stadium for jogging and walking and a "sand" golf course. Those needing a real break can quickly fly to Tunis, Malta and points further afield in Europe. ■

The author is the public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli.

At a Glance >>>



Capital: Tripoli

Government type: *Jamahiriya* (a state of the masses) in theory, governed by the populace through local councils

Area: 1,759,540 sq. km.

Comparative area: Slightly larger than Alaska

Population: 6.3 million

Official languages: Arabic; Italian and English are widely understood in the major cities

Religions: Predominantly Sunni Muslim

GDP-per capita: \$14,200

Export commodities: Crude oil, petroleum products and natural gas

Export partners: Italy, Germany and France

Import commodities: Machinery, semi-finished goods and food

Import partners: Italy, China and Turkey

Currency (code): Libyan dinars (LYD)

Internet country code: .ly

Source: Country Background Notes

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